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Local nursery goes even greener with federal, state grants for solar power

FAIRVIEW, Tenn—Nashville Natives, a local greenhouse and nursery, is among 14 Tennessee small business and farms awarded renewable energy grants from USDA Rural Development to cut the cost of doing business by generating electricity from the sun and other renewable sources. The agency's Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) will award another round of REAP grants in 2010.

"As a nursery that specializes in native plants and green roofs, this solar project fits right into our whole strategy for being sustainable," said nursery owner Andy Sudbrock.

"We could not have done this without the federal and state incentives," he added.

REAP grants cover up to 25 percent of the cost of renewable-energy-producing systems like the array of 36 SunPower panels installed on the roof of the equipment barn at Nashville Natives. According to Nashville-based installer LightWave Solar Electric President Steve Johnson the 8.28 kilowatt photo voltaic system at Nashville Natives should generate enough electricity to offset the nursery's typical annual usage.

As with other solar project across the state, electricity produced by the system feeds into the utility lines of the local electric company, in this case Middle Tennessee Electric Membership Corporation. This saves money by negating the need for bulky batteries systems to store power for nights and cloudy days. The Tennessee Valley Authority also pays businesses for electricity produced at about twice the retail rate, adding another incentive to small-scale renewable energy production.

Renewable energy production is also encouraged by federal tax credits and state grants through the Tennessee Clean Energy Technology program that can cover an additional 40 percent of purchase and installation costs.

REAP loan guarantees and grants can be used for renewable energy systems, energy efficiency improvements, feasibility studies and energy audits. It is available to any farm or rural business. More information on the REAP program is at www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/farmbill/index.html.

LightWave helped Nashville Natives apply for the federal and state incentives and is currently installing a second Tennessee REAP-supported project, a 30 kW solar PV system for a small business in Bledsoe County.

"LightWave is a great partner for USDA's renewable energy program," said USDA State Director Bobby Goode. "They help get solar projects like this one for Nashville Natives off the drawing board and prove the size of the company doesn't matter."

"Renewable energy can lower the cost of doing business, and that's good for jobs in rural communities," said Goode.

According to Johnson over the 25-year warranted life of the solar panels, the clean energy produced will offset considerable pollutants compared to coal-fired power plants like 186.5 tons of carbon dioxide emissions, a greenhouse gas; 1,718 pounds of sulfur dioxide, which can cause acid rain; and 550 pounds of smog-producing nitrous oxide.

"The array is expected to produce electricity for the next 40-50 years," said Johnson. "that's a lot of good for the environment and Nashville Natives."

USDA Rural Development invests in jobs, businesses, community infrastructure, homeownership and affordable rental housing in rural communities. Last year Rural Development assisted more than 866,000 Tennessee families and businesses with more than \$619 million in financial assistance through affordable loans, loan guarantees and grants.

Additional information on Nashville Natives and Southeast Green Roofs is available online at www.nashvillenatives.com

Additional information on LightWave Solar is available online at www.lightwavesolarelectric.com

For more information on Rural Development programs contact the Rural Development Area Office in Nashville at 615-783-1359, toll free at 1-800-342-3149 ext. 1359 or visit us online at www.rurdev.usda.gov/tn.

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